



## CANADA WEST FOUNDATION REPORT

# "Where are they now?"

**What's happened to the tens of thousands of Albertans turned away from Social Assistance by the government? PHOTO PIETRI DE VOS JR.**

Gerald Boychuk from Political Science at the University of Alberta recently published a critique of a Canada West Foundation report on welfare reform in Alberta entitled "Where are they now?" Boychuk was interviewed for **Our Voice** by writer Tom Murray.

In a recent report entitled "Where are they now?" the Canada West Foundation found that welfare rolls had been cut significantly in Alberta, and most respondents to their survey had moved on to find jobs and security. As Gerald Boychuk found, after studying their results, the survey had been highly biased and sloppily done. "Where are they now?" indicated that people cut off welfare were moving on to brighter futures, while Boychuk's reading of the survey found that we really don't know "Where are they now?"

**OV:** The original Canada West report, as you point out, is filled with slanted figures and half truths. It seems as though there is an actual agenda to the report.

**GB:** There are only two possibilities: They (CWF) did not possess the expertise and capacity to do such an assessment yet accepted \$120,000 from the government to do it and did it shoddily or, they portray themselves as a dispassionate academic think tank but took the money knowing what the answer to the question "Where are they now?"

would be before they designed the survey. (As I argued, "It would be difficult to imagine a survey methodology that would be more certain to exaggerate the positive post-welfare experience of those leaving social assistance...")

**OV:** The Canada West report claims the government is taking an active stance against poverty, as opposed to passive. These words are repeated through the report. Yet active to them is cutting the welfare rolls and accepting less people on welfare. This has a slightly Orwellian feel to it.

**GB:** I agree with you that the jargon has an Orwellian ring - more is less, passive is active, etc. I do hate these phrases for exactly that reason - governments can claim to being active when they are doing less. It is bureaucratic jargon but I think that different types of jargon are adopted for a reason and have powerful symbolic impact among the policy-makers and people who actually put policies into effect.

**OV:** There is an interesting connection between the slicing of welfare rolls and increased child welfare cases. Do you think the family values folks would be so thrilled to figure this out? More kids being given up, children starving, without proper clothing and shelter?

**GB:** I agree with you that there seems to be a pretty basic contradiction here but the problem is rooted in the fact that the proponents of the "family values" mantra don't see a contradiction.

My much more limited goal has simply been to highlight the extent to which the Canada West Foundation's analysis is grossly unreliable. Probably more so outside the province than inside, it is viewed as an academic think tank that, while it has an obvious ideological slant, produces quality research. As I've said, I hope that other governments don't look to Alberta as a good example for welfare reform. ♦

Gerald Boychuk will be speaking about his analysis of the Canada West Foundation report at the Poverty Amidst Plenty Conference hosted by the Parkland Institute in Edmonton March 4-6.

In coming issues **Our Voice** will attempt to examine the real life stories behind the question, "where are they now?" Where are the people who the government cut off welfare or the people who needed assistance, but were not allowed access. The Canada West Foundation report only contacted, according to Boychuk, approximately 12% of the people who were rolled off welfare. What about the other 88%. Where are they now?

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# Our Voice the spare change magazine

## STOP THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

### AISH Did the government back down?

### Former pimp turns to new life

### The Social Union Huh?





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an income opportunity for  
economically marginalized people in  
our society while communicating  
about their issues to the public.

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North American Street  
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# Theresa McBryan does a smile survey on the street

**N**o home, no car, no money, too old for the world's old-  
est profession. What's a gal to do in the capital city of  
one of the richest provinces in one of the world's most  
desirable countries in which to live. Especially since it  
will be a frosty Friday in hell before she asks Social Services for  
funds.

So why not sell **Our Voice** on a street corner? It doesn't cost  
much to get started.

This was the decision I made in December of last year. Since  
then it has been a very enlightening experience for me. **Our Voice**  
is a real magazine with interesting articles about local people  
whose lives and issues might otherwise never see print. I plug it as  
"all the news that's fit to print in the inner city." I agree with the  
editorial policy and think it's a valuable, albeit small, member of  
the media community in Alberta. I don't feel standing on a street  
corner selling a product I believe in, is in anyway a shameful or  
demeaning activity for me to engage in.

What I do find shameful is the attitude many people in  
Edmonton have toward **Our Voice** vendors. About twenty min-  
utes into my first hour on that street corner I realised that unless I  
found some way to have fun with this job, I would perish of sim-  
ple boredom. So I started playing a game to entertain myself. I  
decided to make eye contact and smile at every person who  
walked by, to see how many people I could coax into smiling  
back at me. This is not an easy city to play that game in.

The widest range of responses came from middle-aged and  
older people. They displayed anything from icy contempt, fear,  
anger, that mouth twitch that doesn't come anywhere near the  
eyes, and frowns to polite nods, friendly greetings, genuine  
warmth and humour.

Children and adolescents of all ethnic and economic groups  
ranged from yelling, jeering, making faces, ignoring, smiling,  
even asking for change or the time or directions. One young lady  
told me she didn't have any money, but she offered me her  
lunch. For the most part I felt it was the younger people who  
related to me more as a real person and not as a poverty icon.

Apparent economic status as evidenced by what people were  
wearing was not a significant predictor of what the individual's  
response to my initiative would be. People in nice clothes could

## Hello Saskatoon

As of March 1 **Our Voice** is again available on the street cor-  
ners of the fair prairie city of Saskatoon. After a two year hiatus  
from Saskatoon, **Our Voice** is pleased to again be able to offer  
poor and homeless people in that community the same oppor-  
tunities toward self-reliance that we offer to our vendors here  
Edmonton and in Winnipeg. We hope that our presence in  
Saskatoon will one day inspire individuals in that city to pro-  
duce their own Saskatoon street paper. One that will focus on  
issues facing people who live in poverty and empower these  
people toward a better and more independent way of life.

We would like to thank Darren Barney for taking the initia-  
tive of distributing **Our Voice** to vendors in Saskatoon as well  
as selling it himself. If anyone in Saskatoon has any ideas for  
stories they would like to see published in **Our Voice** please  
contact us. Good luck Darren and welcome back Saskatoon.



**Artist and Our Voice vendor Theresa McBryan**

be friendly and those in grubby parkas could be grouchy and vice  
versa.

Bear in mind that all of these responses were for nothing more  
than eye contact and a friendly smile from a middle-aged woman  
just trying to sell a magazine. WOW!

We **Our Voice** vendors are not freezing our keesters off on the  
streets just begging for spare change. If you want to give me five  
dollars for a magazine I'll thank you wholeheartedly, I do need  
the money, but please take the magazine. If you just want to help  
a poor person and have already read a copy, please take one to a  
friend or a neighbour. Spread the news. There are many poor, iso-  
lated and unhappy people in the inner city. **Our Voice** is a very  
positive force for connection, understanding and empathy  
between individuals living in poverty and mainstream communi-  
ties. Please don't give us the money and reject the message we  
bring. That is demeaning to us all.

I haven't been making a lot of money selling **Our Voice**. I'd  
estimate between two and two and a half dollars an hour after  
expenses. The working conditions depending on the weather can  
be pretty stressful. But I do need the money I make. My sincere  
thanks to those people who smiled at me. To those who didn't, a  
word of advice, the act of smiling releases endorphines in the  
brain and doesn't crack your face. It makes you feel better. ♦

## Our Voice on the WEB

[www.planet.eon.net/~kwiley/voicehome](http://www.planet.eon.net/~kwiley/voicehome)

Check out **Our Voice** on the internet. We  
have set up a small introductory World Wide  
Web site for people around the world to read  
a bit about Alberta and people here.

**Our Voice** on the internet, our voice to the  
world!

The WEB site is also a good place to email  
us feedback about the magazine.



## "Street Mom" Maggie

by Linda Dumont

Maggie Cunningham is "mom" to a lot of the younger people on the street. Now in her forties, she's been on the street herself since she was thirteen, so she knows all too well what street life is about.

"People ask me, Why do you live on the drag," said Maggie. "You can't answer that."

But she wants to help others to have a better life than she has had.

"All in all, I wish it could have been better," she said, "I say, do you want to be like me, living off the streets, getting beaten up? You don't need that, I don't need that."

Maggie is at the Boyle Street Co-op drop-in every day. Living on welfare, she has to move frequently so, for her, the Co-op is home. That's where she learned to respect her Native culture. She was also inspired by Mary Burlie, the outreach worker who passed away three years ago, and Hope Hunter, director of the Co-op.

"One day I was feeling sorry for myself. I asked Mary Burlie why am I still alive, and Mary said, 'Your time will come. You're not ready to go.'"

Maggie believes she is meant to live today because when she talks to younger people and gives advice, they listen. She has a special concern for the young prostitutes on the street.

"A lot of them are lost and a lot have asthma (from the drugs). Me, I went through the same thing. I've been in the hospital a lot because of drug and alcohol abuse," she said.

Hope Hunter has known Maggie ever since she started working at the Co-op eight years ago. She said Maggie makes a good spokesperson for the community and is a good support for people because she's strong herself and has lots of experience to draw on.

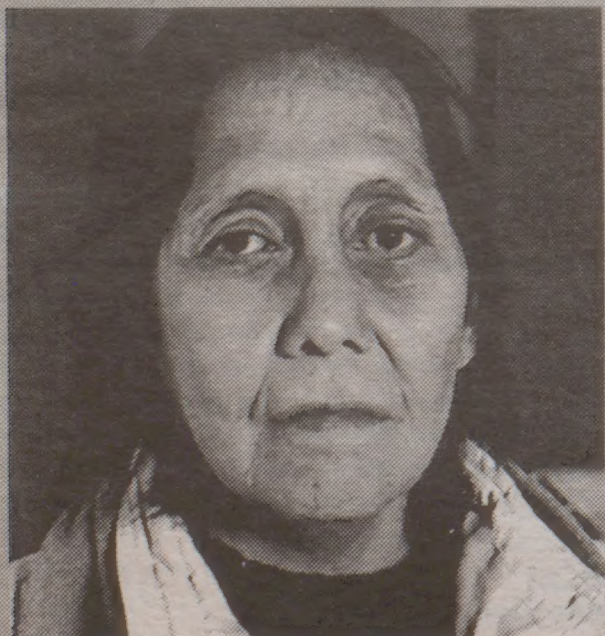
"Maggie has a very sound caring value base," said Hunter, "She's sort of from the old world where the inner city was still a caring place. Old timers had more respect and more acknowledgement of mutual support."

Maggie shares an apartment with Jimmy, another alcoholic. The two lean on each other and depend upon each other. Both have health problems, and have been hospitalised frequently. Jimmy was run over by an LRT last fall.

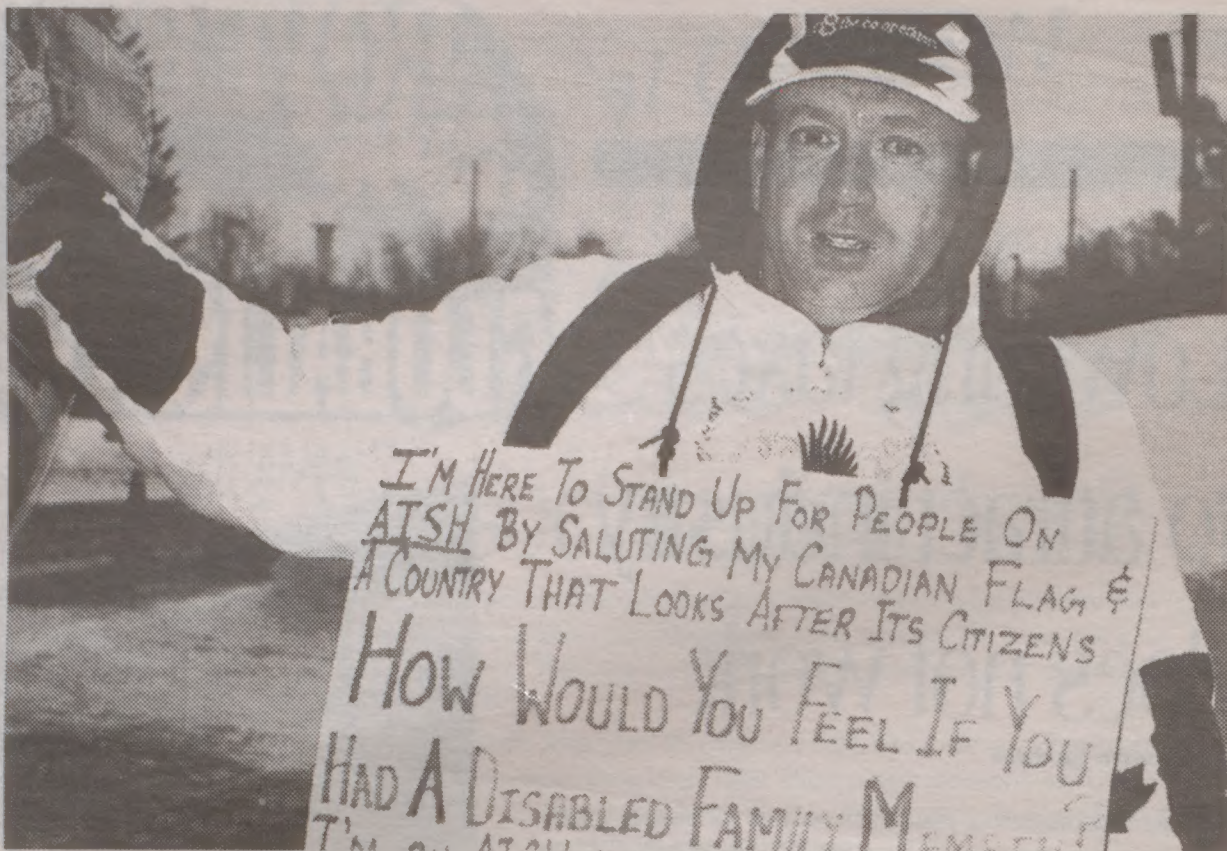
"I don't like to be alone," said Maggie, "It's the worst fear of my life. I gotta have someone around all the time or I think too much about what I did when I was young. All I can do is to try to help people not to do the things I did."

Jimmy is proud of Maggie's role as street mom to the younger people at the Co-op. "They always come to Maggie for advice. She does a lot!" he said.

As a "street mom" she is an informal counselor, having earned respect on the street where respect has to be earned through building up trust. ♦



Maggie Cunningham is a "street mom" and mentor.



Dennis Lowe, above, and participants at Legislature, below.

## AISH rally hears about hardships

Story and photos by Kasandra Caldwell

On a chilly February 16, about 70 brave disabled Edmontonians and their supporters came to a rally at the Alberta Legislature to "thank" Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Family and Social Services, for keeping intact the program of Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH).

Oberg's assistant, Jordan Cleland, reiterated that Oberg is increasing work incentives, and added that Oberg has increased the asset limit. However, he did not address the question of increasing the AISH monthly income.

"What is there to thank him (Oberg) for?" asked AISH recipient, Dennis Lowe. "AISH should be at least \$1000/month. My fridge is empty most of the time." Dennis was in a school for Downs Syndrome children all his life and, like 90% of AISH recipients, will never be able to work.

Lillian lives on \$744 a month. "I came to see what they're going to do. I go low on food all the time and I feel like it's not enough to live on," she says.

Marlene is on AISH, and was there with her dog, looking quite prosperous. However, as with many mentally ill people, appearances are deceiving. She has physical disabilities, and a major affective disorder, which is depression. "I could use \$200 more. I have a hearing problem, meaning a \$1000 for a hearing aid, and I can't save."

Isabelle, also on AISH, spoke, "I'm worried about my son, who has cerebral palsy, and is on AISH. AISH should be increased to \$1100 a month with full medical benefits." She wonders what he will do when he is a senior citizen, with no money for medical expenses.

Cleland made five clarifications to the new AISH program:

1. Assured Support recipients will remain there, they will not go on welfare.
2. AISH workfare, unlike that of welfare, is voluntary. For work incentives, there will be job training, continued medical coverage, and easy,



next-day, re-entry to AISH.

3. The asset testing limit will be "much higher" than the \$5000 stated two weeks ago, "based on the input we've received"

4. Dental benefits have not increased.

5. Last year, the government imposed a \$2 co-payment for up to three prescriptions (\$6 a month), and offset that by raising AISH by \$5 a month.

The reason for the co-payment for prescriptions, Oberg had announced in the Edmonton Journal, was that the use of drugs had increased alarmingly. However, the fault for that may lie with the low monthly AISH income. A recent Ontario study showed that, under financial stress, those on welfare use more medical facilities, raising Medicare costs enormously, perhaps more than the savings in monthly rates.

"We have to keep our voices loud, write our provincial members and MLAs, write to the newspapers and radio and tv stations, phone Ralph Klein on his monthly phone-in show on 630 CHED, circulate petitions and call your disability groups and associations," said Gary Trudel, a rally organiser.

Liberal Party leader Nancy McBeth was at the rally and expressed her disappointment at the government's manner.

"They didn't even mention the AISH program in the Speech from the Throne. They made a mistake in not talking to people who are directly affected by the program. It was "leaked out" instead. AISH is a program which serves an important purpose. There is a big difference between AISH and welfare."

Regina Parker, who organised the rally, is getting people together to interview Oberg about this issue. She can be reached at Poverty In Action, 990-1840. ♦



Globalisation meets poverty- Part II

# Lowering taxes to attract industry does not work

by Kasandra Caldwell

The manufacturing plants will only go someplace where there are lower taxes. How low do our taxes have to go, and contribute to a lack of social supports, before we say, "Okay, we're hurting enough now, supporting the corporations on the backs of the poor".

We must watch the example of Europe. They have for decades stayed prosperous on the following formula: keep taxes high, wage rates high, and social programs healthy, and engaged in free trade which was truly reciprocal.

We must ignore the naysayers who want to point out that bad old Europe still has nobility. Yes, but the entire people are noble. We must ignore the argument that Europe can do it because their culture is homogeneous. That is not an argument, it is a mindless excuse.

We must avoid watching the example of social failures such as New Zealand, which cut its deficit on the backs of the poor.

## We give big welfare to the Ghermezians

The Ghermezians, owners of West Edmonton Mall, have been allowed to avoid debts of over \$73 million (by buying their own company and dissolving the assets). Those gifts, to three men, would pay more than 8100 AISH recipients for one year each. Presently, there are 23,000 recipients.

According to the recent auditor general's report, the Alberta Treasury Branch provided them with a \$418 million loan package, and by October of 1998, it had cost taxpayers \$152 million.

## United Nations supports the poor in Canada

The United Nations (U.N.) is forcing us to send aid to third-world countries. The U.N. is forcing us to resolve our Aboriginal land issues, at cost to us. The U.N. is forcing us to reduce our carbon-dioxide emissions, at another cost to us. Yet we hesitate to force third-world countries to pay their workers a decent wage so that we will have, in turn, a decent wage. (Unfortunately, the aid money we send goes to the wealthy in other countries, and the poorest people pay the highest



Kasandra Caldwell, Our Voice vendor, in front of the Hong Kong Bank of Canada in Edmonton.

taxes in Canada, after loopholes, so our aid goes from our poor to their wealthy.)

It is interesting to note that it is also the U.N. that requires Canada to provide a decent standard of living for our poor: not in relation to third world countries, but in relation to the rest of the country.

## Legislation made and unmade the middle class

Before the 1930s, there was no middle class. We were as skewed as the worst Latin American countries. It was just after the terrible Great Depression of the 1930s that governments first developed legislation to help the middle class have more free money (tax breaks) and have a better education (grants and loans). Before that, North American economies were bottom-heavy with many poor, and very few rich at the top.

But in the last two decades, the right wing has convinced us all that it is unfair to give concessions to the middle class and under. They have persuaded us that we should have the same taxes for corporate profiteers, very high earners, and investment income. There are good reasons for the tax breaks to ordinary earners.

We taxed corporations more than the worker because corporations innately get special tax concessions by their formation: they do not eat or sleep, they have an infinite life, and are "limited" or non-suable. Those are big concessions, and none of us has them.

We taxed corporate executives more than the average worker because they have a support system provided by the bigness of the corporation, in the form of secretaries, offices, non-taxable expenses, and so on. None of us have these.

We taxed investment income more than regular, earned income because body-and-blood earners have to eat and drink, have shelter, and transport themselves to work, among many other expenses.

We once knew this unequivocally. Yet, in the last two decades, the right wing people have convinced us that we made ourselves, through free enterprise. The right wing is always able to twist compassionate, sensible arguments to their purpose. For example, during the Reagan years, they said that the reason the middle class should pay higher taxes is because they use more government services than corporations or the fewer rich. As I have pointed out, that is not a reason, that is an obfuscation of the special privileges that corporations and the high earners get to begin with, from our governments, from our votes.

Having a healthy middle-class gives hope and opportunity to the poor. So does having healthy unions, which we also no longer have, due to selfish thinking.

Watch for Part III, the conclusion of Kasandra's look at Globalisation. She goes on to discuss how unions have betrayed the poor and the ramifications of corporations taking a strong hold on democracy. ♦



## I like Kasandra and Kasian

I've read through your volume 6 number 1 edition of *Our Voice*. I particularly liked the article by Kasandra Caldwell. I, as a reader, was pleased by the article about Desmond Tutu. It was a very well written article. I also liked the article by Kasian Girasek. I thought it was interesting and all the other articles were interesting as well, but the two I've mentioned I found most interesting.

Ben G.  
Edmonton

## Homemakers value should be treated accordingly

It used to be that being a homemaker was an hon-

ourable profession. After all, it takes a lot of hard work, care and intelligence to be a wife, mother, housekeeper, cook, nurse and childcare worker. Since the women's movement to fight for the right to be considered human with enough intelligence to vote, our reward has been that now we are required to go out and work as well as continue with our duties as a homemaker.

When a man or woman applies for social services they are REQUIRED to participate in the workforce program and actively look for work outside the home. No longer is being a homemaker considered a worthy occupation, not that it ever did pay much above room and board. Equal rights should mean that men or women have the right to a guaranteed income if they

choose the right to be a homemaker.

It might do well for our society to take a good look at why there are so many youth gangs. In the absence of parents in the home, because out of necessity, they've had to be out working, children are turning to gangs to become their families and mentors. If at least one parent had the choice to stay home with the children instead of being forced out of the home, we might see our children once again turn to their parents for moral and family values. Maybe someone could get this message through to our governments-particularly Social Services.

Donna  
Edmonton.

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# How the government hornswoggled the disabled

**H**ave I heard it correctly? Is the disabled community and are many disabled individuals thanking Dr. Lyle Oberg for what he plans to do to AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped). Some seventy people rallied at the Alberta Legislature in mid-February to show their support for Dr. Oberg.

Well, it sure has been an effective exercise of good old fashioned hornswoggling on behalf of the Alberta government and its Family and Social Service's department.

First they used the media to perpetuate public ire against disabled people receiving income assistance, by releasing information about seven AISH recipients who had large trust funds. Of course these seven individuals have nothing to do with the some 23,000 other disabled folks who are far worse off. Then the government leaked a document stating that changes to the AISH program were forthcoming in that benefits would be decreased to welfare levels and that incentives to put disabled people to work would be created.

A fear ran through the disabled community. They were going to have their already meagre benefits slashed to an even lower level of subsistence. Not only that, they might be forced to get jobs, jobs picked for them by the government. This a very reasonable fear. People who are disabled and have difficulty caring for themselves at the best of times, the large majority of whom live in severe poverty, had to now imagine living with even less money. There was also the fear that if the job they were forced into didn't work out, there would be no money at all.

Changes such as these were bound to stir a reaction and they did. Leaders of the disabled communities rose to the occasion, disabled people themselves gathered together to express disgust with what was being done to them. It became big news. No question. As apathetic as society seems to be at times, there was no way slashing and burning the rights of those most vulnerable citizens would go unhindered.

The leaders of the disabled community, the organisations and associations that work on the behalf of disabled citizens, came together with Dr. Oberg to try to convince him that any reductions in support levels to disabled people would be disastrous.

The uproar was boisterous enough for Oberg to backtrack, though his repeal was far from heroic. He vowed that he would not change the benefits disabled people were receiving, neither lowering them nor increasing them, but still the work incentive programs would begin.

This gave relief to disabled Albertans. They would not fall deeper into poverty than they already are. It is easy to understand their apprehension about rocking the boat, however. They would not want to induce any further threats to their survival.

So what about an increase in the amount of assistance disabled people receive? Why can't we talk about this? Some get \$529 a month, some \$610, some \$823. It's just not enough. But no one's talking about increases anymore. All we hear is support and thanks for what Dr. Oberg has done and he has done nothing but back off from his threats to disabled people.

He does say, about the work incentive programs, that if an individual does not succeed at a job, they will be granted next day readmittance to AISH benefits. If guidelines for success are as rigid as they are for those participating in welfare employment programs, however, many people will not be so lucky to get next day readmittance. For example, I spoke with one fellow who now lives in an inner city hotel. He was on social services and was taking part in a work-fare program that paid him less than \$4 an hour. He was late only one time, because his bus was late by five minutes and he was dismissed from the program and cut off of welfare. He now picks bottles.

We all know how speedy the government is. Next day anything is a fantasy. I once applied for a new Alberta Health care card and it took them three months to get it to me. In three months how many disabled people could starve to death?

The disabled community and the people who represent them should be demanding increases, not thanking Dr. Oberg for manipulating them. Essentially all he's done is bullied them into giving him support. It's kind of like...well if I had ten bags of groceries and a gun and I walked up to a person who had one bag of groceries and no gun. I put the gun to their head and take away their bag of groceries, when I really should be giving this person some of my groceries. But they tell me they really need that bag of groceries so I think about it and then I return the bag. This person then falls to their knees and thanks me because I've done something so great and I'm such an understanding person. Well the truth, of course, is that I'm not and neither is Lyle Oberg.

Michael Walters

Editorial OPINION

**Our Voice** the spare change magazine

## The social union, huh?

**N**ot a week goes by these days without some people trudging up my back lane looking for bottles. I don't know if every back lane is like mine, but it's a regular thing. They've got a grocery shopping cart, and they are doing their job, picking bottles.

It's got to be tough. Some days it's cold, very cold, and some days there's lots in their carts, and sometimes there's very little. These people are survivors, living off the streets of our city. But should they be glorified for being survivors, or are these people an embarrassment for a modern and wealthy society?

The fact that bottle-picking is evolving as a career-choice says something about how our society is going, and the recent federal provincial accord, the social union, is another indicator.

The social union has been a hard thing to get a grip on, a slippery version of Meech Lake. Newspaper columnist Lorne Gunter is dead against it, so it can't be all bad. But a lot of people who are usually very concerned about social welfare policy are also very critical.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives recently released a whole book on the subject, *Finding our Collective Voice: Options for a New Social Union*. The book is a constructive look at some models for what Canada's social union could be. But when it comes to the recent federal provincial agreement, these authors say that the social union is a step in "dismantling the welfare state and creating the social conditions for Canada's integration into a larger North American economy characterized by lower wages, lower social standards and worse living conditions." More bottle-picking. There's been a great deal of "welfare state dismantling" going on in recent years. If you're Lorne Gunter, this is a great thing. For Gunter it means hard-working citizens can pay lower taxes. But if you lose your job, or the boss lowers your wages, or you don't have strong computers skills, watch out, you could get stuck with bottle-picking. It's an economy of winners and losers, win big or lose big. And like any crap shoot there are more losers than winners.

One of the key features of the social union agreement is the preservation of national standards in social programs, or at least that's what Jean Chretien said. The real

story is that a lot of control for social programs is being handed over to provinces. That can mean more competition between provinces, seeing who can have the lower minimum wage, or say, lower welfare rates so as to attract fewer "eastern bums". It definitely is a weakening of the national concept of our country.

Modern Canada has kept itself different from the United States with national standards and with social programs. Progressive taxation has helped to spread the wealth around a bit, so that the worst inequities in a free-wheeling economy have been reduced. And we've had a lot less bottle-picking type living than the U.S.

But, if the social union proves to be really more of a social disunion, things could get worse yet at the bottom.

Keith Wiley

HEY-- WE DIDN'T CALL  
DIS SOCIAL UNION STUFF  
A CONTRACT  
FOR NOTHING...





# The Social Union

## What is it?

## What does it do?

by Dale Ladouceur

"I'm having the same questions as anyone else because there is nothing out there," worries Midge Cuthill, one of the founding members of Poverty in Action and a board member of the National Anti-Poverty Organisation. "When we go out and talk to the public as one of our initiatives, one of the things we will be speaking on is the social union and what it means - so we can fully understand it."

Negotiations leading up to the signing of the mysterious Social Union agreement on February 4th had largely occurred behind closed doors. These meetings between the premiers and the federal government regarding health and social issues had been taking place for the past few years but the agreement only came to light after both governments signed it, in a record four hours, making it law on February 4th.

The overview of the agreement appears largely

given to interpretation because the document itself gives little more than vague goals and idyllic aspirations with no apparent way to hold any government body accountable.

All provinces and territories will get more cash from Ottawa in return for promising to spend it on health care and social programs. There is a "Mobility within Canada" section that says that anyone has equal access to programs no matter where they live, except in Quebec because they did not sign the agreement.

There is also reference to "all Canadians treated with fairness and equity" and "providing appropriate assistance to those in need". But there is no real plan for how this is to take place.

The initial reaction of the National Association of Women and the Law, the Charter Committee on Poverty Issues and the Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodations was dismay. "At the heart of any social union framework," said Shelagh Day, Special Advisor on Human Rights to the National Association of Women and the Law, "must be an agreement on common standards for social programs and services that will give effect to our commitment to, and our shared responsibility for, the individual and collective well-being of all Canadians." Day continues to say "This framework provides no such standards. Instead, it

provides a statement of vague "principles" which are essentially meaningless and certainly unenforceable."

"Without common standards that reflect Canada's domestic and international commitments to economic, social and cultural rights and to the equality rights of all its people, this framework is heartless," said Bruce Porter, speaking for the Charter Committee on Poverty issues. "It is a technical construction for politicians, but it is empty of promise for the lives of citizens."

One of the more ironic points of the Social Union is "Informing Canadians - Public Accountability and Transparency." The first point reads: "Canada's Social Union can be strengthened by enhancing each government's transparency and accountability to its constituents." It then describes how it will do this through monitoring and measuring outcomes of social programs and reporting regularly to constituents on the performance of these programs.

"(That) part I found really interesting," said Brian Bechtel, executive director of Edmonton's Social Planning Council. "In the summary there was talk of a need for transparency and public consultation, that hasn't happened at all. It sure didn't happen around disability programs, there was no transparency and no consultation."

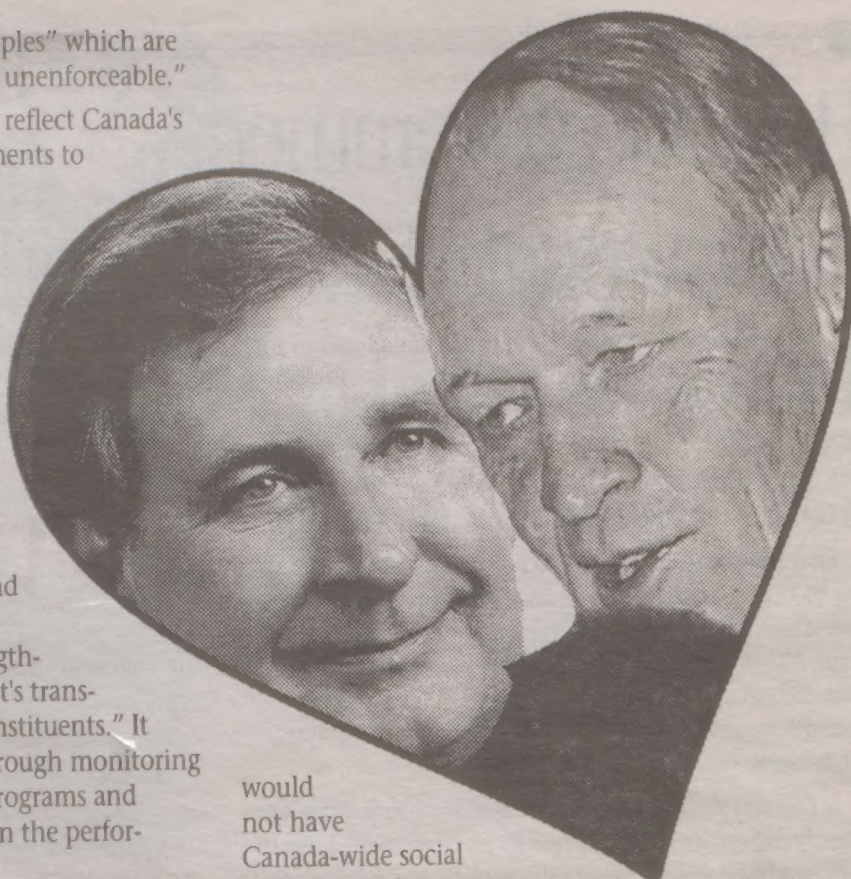


The agreement calls for a review of the framework by the end of the third year with public participation. But there has been no public participation in the development of this framework or no information provided to the public. Considering that the bottom line of social and health issues are people, this raises a number of pertinent questions.

Cuthill is echoing the same concerns as many in her field. "Very little information has been out there, it seemed like (both governments) have been pushing it too fast, which makes you ask; what's going on?" Cuthill agrees that it's a lip service document with a lot of money doled out to the provinces to do with what they wish.

In the November 1998 issue of *Policy Options*, the entire magazine was dedicated to the Social Union. The only two recognisable names that had written articles on this were Minister of Justice Anne McLellan and Premier Roy Romanow. Ms. McLellan is also the Chair of the Social Union Committee of Cabinet. Her report was a glowing tribute to the Agreement.

"Without the federal spending power we



would not have Canada-wide social programs such as Medicare," read McLellan's account, "Indeed, we would not have a Canada-wide social safety net."

"Ralph Klein already tried to opt out of the Canada Health Act provisions against double billing for health care procedures covered under Medicare," said Alberta New Democrats president Les Steel. "It was only the withholding of millions of dollars in federal health transfers that made him back down. It doesn't matter who you listen to," continues Steel, "if you listen to Klein or anyone, they all want more power in the provinces and I have a big concern because it fragments our country and you lose the national standards."

Brian Bechtel agrees "my worst concerns...in general are I don't like the de-evolution of authority to provinces and I don't like the erosion of national standards," Bechtel adds "Given our spirits here in Alberta we're not really comfortable with the provincial government basically (being able to) do what it wants." ♦

**National standards for social programs? It depends who you talk to.**

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# LIFERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

## My story and Erin's story

BY DONNA LAPRETRE

I keep thinking I should be used to people looking at me like I've got two heads, but I'm not. It still hurts. I married Freddie in November, 1995 after an eight-month "courtship" - if visiting a man in a federal penitentiary where all visits and phone calls are monitored can be called a courtship. Freddie had served his life-20 sentence and was scheduled to begin working his way out. His mother, a friend of mine, introduced me to him by phone. After three months of the occasional telephone conversations, I went with his mother a couple of times to visit him. I liked everything about him. After four years, I still do, but it has been an extremely frustrating and lonely existence.

Family and friends thought I'd lost my mind, and while most of them have continued to give me support, they could not understand the choices I've made. Others have refused further association with me. When I tell anyone I married a man who has spent all his adult life in prison, people generally think I must somehow be intellectually and emotionally inferior. I tried, but could not find others I could talk to who would understand what I was going through. The only ones who could empathise were the wives and families of other inmates.

Trying to relate to a man who has served over 40 years in prison and is institutionalised became a whole new challenge that I was ill-prepared for. It has taken a lot of time, patience, talking and understanding to accept that he came into this relationship with a very difficult set of issues. He didn't trust anyone. His fear of getting out, facing responsibility, not knowing how to handle freedom or a society he no longer relates to has caused him to periodically sabotage his own release. It has also impacted our marriage.

Many of us, as wives or family of inmates, live in poverty. Our inmate is almost always in an institution so far away it is impossible for us to visit, except maybe on rare occasions. Phone calls all come collect and even living in the same city the calls come through as a long distance charge. We are being punished right along with our inmate. Statistics show that after three years, many wives, partners or family give up and go on to make a new life for themselves. The inmate is abandoned by those closest to him, his only contact with the outside world.

Freddie has been "educated" to be completely dependent on the system. His peers and mentors during his first incarceration at the age of 14 introduced him to drugs, gambling, violence and the underworld of survival of the fittest in some of the most notorious federal prisons in Canada. He admits he has no idea of the cost of living or the complexities of today's world. His world revolves around himself, keeping safe and fighting to have his needs met. His struggle to overcome his fears of coming out to an unknown future,

in an unknown society with an unknown family takes all of his time, energy and concentration. Nothing he does can include me until he's out. It took three years before his desire to be free and home with me overcame his fear of release.

As a visitor, I find Correctional Services institutions frightening and intimidating. Information is scarce and access to services virtually non-existent. CSC personnel are often rude, abrupt and prejudiced toward Freddie and I. Many CSC staff look at me and treat me as though by association I am "less than". They seem incapable of separating the criminal from the crime and the wife from the criminal.

This has probably been the most frustrating experience of my life. But Freddie and I have made a commitment to each other and our marriage. We'll stick to it and work it out together - somehow. Through trial and practice I'm learning to put myself in Freddie's moccasins. I try to look at things from his perspective and give him the love, security, time and space he needs to accept and adjust to what will be a new and foreign way of life....

In the meantime, I continue to watch enviously the togetherness of other couples. My daily life consists of loneliness, confusion and isolation. My only hope is that someday....maybe....I'll be able to go to sleep at night with my husband's arms around me. Meanwhile, our souls walk in each other's hearts.

### Erin's Story

In 1993 Erin was a pretty, 23 year-old, single mother with two small children. James was a 33 year-old good-looking, muscle-bound young man. He had been a federal inmate and was out on parole. A mutual friend introduced them and it was love at first sight.

Erin didn't know what she was getting herself into. Their first six months together were great. Because of the age difference, James brought some stability to Erin's life. They had much in common; he was good to her children and they liked him. Then the bottom fell out of Erin's world.

"Early in 1994 James's urine test was positive for drugs. He was sent back to jail. He had not reoffended



Erin and James

or picked up any new charges, but it was a breach of his parole," says Erin. "My children and I thought James's return to jail would be short-term. We all thought he would be home soon to pick up where we left off and he would be the husband and father I knew he could be. The days turned into months and the months into years.

"In the past five years James and I have had a child together and been married. We looked forward to getting married free of the razor wires, gun towers and steel doors with their revolving locks. But as time wore on,

the desire to be married and united as one outweighed the elusive dream of freedom.

"It has been a difficult struggle to maintain this relationship. We have fought long and hard for us and his freedom. I believe one day we will have it all.

"Unfortunately, most families live long distance. This makes our only means of communication, and visits, few and far between. I have rarely ever felt that Correctional Services has any respect for me as a person or as a wife and mother. Many of us live on social assistance. We don't have enough to live on as it is, yet correctional institutions are designed to shut us out and keep us apart while at the same time paying lip service in their literature to encouraging families to "stay in contact". We get no breaks and long distance collect calls are the most expensive way to call. Everything they do seems to be designed to push us away and separate us from our husbands.

"As time goes on I continue to struggle to raise my three children alone. My baby misses her daddy. I miss him. As a young woman and mother I find it difficult to be mother and father to my children and the loneliness is almost unbearable. So I continue on alone.... waiting, dreaming, hoping for my future - together with the man I love and our children." ♦

*In the February Issue of Our Voice Donna Lapretre began a series of articles looking at the lives of prisoners and their families. She has shared her own feelings about being married to a prisoner and those of Erin as well. Her next piece will focus on children and how they cope while being separated from parents who are in prison.*



Donna LaPrete



# POVERTY IN ACTION



## International Women's Day Why a parade?

BY LORRAINE GREGOIRE

I asked a few women if they attend the International Women's Day Parade. "International Women's Day? What's that?"

"I think I went one year...too many radical feminists; no maybe that was something else."

"I haven't been to a march in years; I'm not a feminist anymore."

"Something else always comes up, or I forget."

"Maybe if I had a specific issue I'd go."

I don't think not knowing about International Women's Day (IWD) is a sign of indifference but just another testament to your lives being so busy that celebrating being a woman takes the form of feeling guilty about taking time for yourselves.

I was 36 years old, recently divorced, trying to raise two teenage daughters, and experiencing living on a limited income when I first heard of IWD. I regret that these events had to be happening in my life before realising the inequality that exists for women. I guess, like a lot of others, I put on blinders and ignored the reality until I had no choice and came face to face with it.

As I prepared to write this article, I decided it was important to ask women what they liked most about being a woman. The reoccurring theme and topic most often mentioned was the importance of being a mother. My concern is the way our society values the mother staying home to bring up her children as long as there is someone's pay cheque there to allow this. For those who have to rely on social services financially or those who survive on limited incomes, the importance of raising your children gets thrown out the window. You are expected to find a job when your child is 6 months old.

Although I did the best I could, my role as a mother is not one of my shining accomplishments. I'm truly thankful there are parenting classes and support systems in place to help us bring up our children. I think of the mom struggling with finding good, affordable daycare, juggling two part-time jobs at minimum wage, and wonder where she is supposed to fit in supportive resources in the community that will help her become a skilled parent.

One of the great things to come about as a result of valuing women's place in the home and at work is the acceptance of working outside of the home and rais-

ing children. The current federal government was elected into office by women who thought they were voting for a National Childcare Program. We are still waiting. I don't want to get into the debate of "nurture" vs

"nature" but I also feel the need to mention women who can not have children or women who decide not to have children. Women lead fulfilling and exciting lives without needing children to make their lives complete.

I heard on the news the other day that there are women receiving old age pensions who are just realising their freedom with possibly the first money they have that is their's alone. Women should not spend their whole lives in unhappy situations because of perceived financial dependence.

I think this is my personal reason for attending IWD. I want to show my respect for the women before me who have actively advocated on behalf of women so that we can enjoy some of the freedoms we now have. I encourage you to celebrate being a woman in whatever way makes sense to you. You are worth it. ♦



### POVERTY IN ACTION

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## 1999 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

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WOMEN'S DAY



## STREET NEWSPAPERS

Streetwise Chicago's street newspaper

# Charting history in inches Every individual is an achievement

BY JASON ULANE

*In its six-year history, Streetwise has grown to become one of the most successful street newspapers in North America. Its goal has always been to empower homeless individuals and point them toward a better tomorrow, one hopefully free of poverty, welfare, alcohol or drugs. That in itself is a major achievement.*

*But Streetwise has become more than just a newspaper that gives a glimpse at a world that many people never knew existed. It has become a symbol of hope. To many it is a positive voice and force that echoes out and resonates, blocking out the sounds of despair and negativity that permeate the neighborhoods of the South and West Side of Chicago.*

### Life Before Streetwise

"Before Streetwise, those who were on welfare, homeless, with no support or work to provide a means of income had to rely on other means to be able to survive on the street," says Anthony Oliver, Streetwise executive director. "To these individuals, tomorrow was too far away. It was a matter of how to get through today, sometimes by any means necessary, sometimes illegally. No positive options were being presented, from the state, government or their community. It is as if the world had turned its back on this element of society."

Streetwise arose in response to this environment. Slowly, the paper and organisation have grown from a work empowerment organisation to playing an active, visible role in the community and city. Overall, Streetwise's greatest achievement lies in every person who has the desire to rise and take control of their life and make the change from the ingrained mind set of dependency to becoming self-determined and self-motivated.

### Motivate and Educate

"We provide the tools and resources," says Oliver. "It rests in the mind and heart of every person who walks through that door and says 'I want to change my life; I can make that change.' Once that seed is planted, we can help them get on the ladder to move up and make that transition."

### From Renting to Owning Your Future

"When you step back and look at how the paper has grown, it really is quite amazing," says Oliver. "Streetwise has evolved into a top quality newspaper with insightful, well-written stories and a layout that can stand up to some of the best papers in Chicago. Its success is unparalleled to any other street newspaper in the US." In six years, Streetwise has become one of the largest and most successful street newspapers in North America."

That impressive statistic can be attributed to the

hard working, dedicated staff of the newspaper and board of directors, plus the vendors that are the front line emissaries of the newspaper.

To the casual stranger, the concept of Streetwise sometimes never gets past that image of the licensed Streetwise vendor on a corner selling the paper to passersby. This aspect has not escaped Oliver, who would like that perception to change in the future.

"What Streetwise needs to do is show the people of Chicago what is going on behind the scenes. We are training people to use computers, and getting them to try things that they never would in a million years believe themselves capable of. Many of them are coming in off the street with their cup or dirty squeegee as their only means of income and we are giving them a product they want to sell - plus a future off the street." Another accomplishment has been the transition from renting to owning their space. Their headquarters has expanded in size and location, from 5,000 to 15,000 square feet. This space serves as headquarters for the paper plus a distribution and registration point for vendors.



It is also home to their computer learning lab and classroom. Here vendors can log into a computer terminal and tutor themselves. This is part of Oliver and Streetwise's "Train First" mentality.

### Train First, Get a Job Second

"Our goal is to train first, then get a job, which is the polar aspect of the welfare method, which is to find a job then train them in that work. By following that system, the individual is locked into that strata of work, which is usually very low pay and demeaning to boot. The welfare system puts people off working by saying that it will take care of you because you don't know any better.

"Streetwise is the alternative to that defeatist way of thinking. It might be tougher, more demanding and difficult, but in the long run, it's worth it." Oliver has the statistics to prove it. Last year, over 34 percent of all employees found and achieved jobs.

One major milestone in Streetwise's six-year history has been the creation of its Campaign for Work Empowerment. Working with various corporations and associations throughout the Chicago area, Streetwise has invested in its future plus the communities it seeks to change.

### Toward the Future

For the future, Anthony Oliver wants to keep building upon the foundation which he has laid during his tenure as executive director.

"Regarding the future, I would like Streetwise to be read throughout the Chicago area and viewed as a valuable news source that addresses socially responsible issues.

"More importantly, Streetwise is working to create a partnership with the communities within this city to act on finding a solution to homelessness and poverty. To do that you must encourage the spirit of volunteerism and help the citizens within those communities understand major issues and become socially active. That is the future goal of Streetwise and we are fully committed to realising it, every day, inch by inch." ♦

the street paper movement

**NASNA**

The North American Street Newspaper Association [www.speakeasy.org/nasna](http://www.speakeasy.org/nasna)

Every so often **Our Voice** will feature other street publications from around the world. We wish to provide our readers with a look at projects like ours in other communities. Each street publication essentially has the same goal in mind, but each of us boast our own unique qualities. We will tell you a bit about the publication and publish one of their recent articles.

The street paper movement in North America and

around the world is growing and working harder and more effectively at giving voice and power to those members of our society who find themselves marginalised in any shape or form.

The mission of the North American Street Newspaper Association is to support a street newspaper movement that creates and upholds journalistic and ethical standards while promoting self-help and empowerment among people living in poverty. ♦



BY LINDA DUMONT

Ken Hunchak is back on the street, but this time it's to help others get off the street. He's part of Anchor Ministries, a volunteer street ministry working out of the Inner City Mission.

"Tonight I wasn't really expecting anything," said Ken, "but then a man came in here and said 'I was going to jump off a bridge but something brought me to the light here.'"

That light wasn't always part of Ken's life. About ten years ago, he was in the other man's shoes, ready to end it all, to escape the pain of life as an addict, dealing and pimping to support his cocaine habit.

Ken started using drugs and alcohol at the age of 13 because he wanted to be like everyone else.

Ken tried them all: speed, LSD, MDA, and finally cocaine.

"I started with grass, then came the hippy explosion. We explored everything.

At first Ken worked and dealt drugs to subsidise his habit. Over time he got into cocaine.

"It always comes out at Christmas. Then it was every month, then every week, then all the time. Once you get into the free base, now they call it crack, that's when it takes control of your life."

For the next nine years Ken was addicted to cocaine. To supply his habit, he was dealing drugs.

"We had many connections," he said, "It's a big ring...Chinese, Portuguese..."

Finally he and a partner got a girl to work the streets for them. She too was hooked on cocaine, and was kept working to support her habit.

"After about a month, the only way to keep her in line was to beat her," Ken said, "I couldn't do it. That's when life went downhill."

Ken just wanted to end it all. He drove his snowmobile full speed into the face of a cliff. When he was thrown off, he lost his mitts and his gloves from the impact.

"I remember lying there in the middle of the lake. I said, Lord, I can't do it anymore. If you want me or not I'm coming."

Former pimp  
back on the street

## This time he's helping



Ken Hunchak, right, sings with a client at the Mission, Darryl Charland PHOTO: LINDA DUMONT

Miraculously, within minutes of dying, Ken was found.

When he regained consciousness three weeks later in the hospital, he had a visitor. It was the man who found him.

"He said he was on the lake riding trikes with some friends. It was the last ride before calling it a day. He heard a strong voice calling and broke away from the group to see who it was," Ken said. "He passed where I was, and heard a voice again calling him to come back."

"He said he saw me standing waving at him, and saw the light flash off my suit."

Ken believes it must have been an angel who called the man, and who waved to him because at that time, Ken was lying unconscious on the snow. He had head injuries, a fractured pelvis, a broken shoulder, and frozen hands and feet.

After the accident, Ken didn't remember anything of his past life. Gradually, pieces started coming together, but even now there are some bits he can't remember.

"It was like starting over," he said, "I had to learn everything."

He remembers the first time he put on his socks by himself, it took fifteen minutes, and he felt really good about it.

Today, he credits divine intervention with his 100 per cent recovery from brain damage. The fact that he can use his hands and feet is another miracle. When he was first admitted to the hospital, the plastic surgeon on duty said he needed immediate amputation. But there was a shift change, and another young plastic surgeon came on duty. He decided to wait, and amputate only if infection set in.

Ken's life turned around after his accident. Today, he is a successful equipment broker with a wife and three children.

He was drawn back to the street when he heard Pastor Laurie LaFleur speaking about the Mustard Seed and its work with street people.

"What amazes me now is that I ever found the time to drink," Ken said. ♦

### COMMENTARY

## NEW JUVENILE PROSTITUTION LAW Getting them off the streets is a start

### but exactly what will be done during those 72 hours?

By Tom Murray

A new law allowing police to pick up and confine teenage prostitutes for a maximum of 3 days has gone into effect, and seems to have caused little controversy in the media. News releases and articles are slightly vague on certain elements of the law, such as treatment for prostitutes.

On the surface, however, it does have many good qualities to recommend to it. It reclassifies those who participate in child prostitution as sexual abusers, and therefore entails harsher penalties for pimps and Johns.

In a government press release, Heather Forsyth, MLA, Calgary-Fish Creek and Chair of the Task Force on Children Involved in Prostitution was quoted as saying "Recognising that children involved in prostitution are victims of sexual abuse is a major step forward. Now, we can offer appropriate treatment services to them and ensure they receive assistance."

Most child care workers and inner city workers seem to welcome the intent of the new law, but they



are also a little worried as to the possible repercussions. While there is universal approval over the new classification of Johns as child abusers, one of the questions raised is whether people will be misled into thinking the problem will be solved, as opposed to being merely driven underground. Child prostitutes are already on the boundaries of the underground, and Forsyth herself has worried that the law may simply drive the problem on to other provinces.

Another of the questions raised is whether child prostitutes will be simply kept out of view, as in instances where houses are set up to accommodate a steady stream of Johns, and prostitutes are not allowed to leave. An operation much like that was discovered in Calgary last year. There is also a perception that the root causes of these issues are possibly being ignored.

A volunteer from one of the women's shelters in town, who did not wish to be named, said "There seems to be a lack of understanding as to why they're

Continued on next page



# HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE

## Rights: out of the spotlight Gone and forgotten?

By Dale Ladouceur

"All Human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights," reads the first article in the Universal Declaration Of Human Rights. It is a document that brings a tear to the eye upon reading it. The thirty articles speak of a better world, one where abuse and suffering are a thing of the past.

Many were thrilled to hear that the United Nations signing of the Declaration's 50th Anniversary was to be held in Edmonton. Such a significant event in such a remote part of the globe, and it was going to take place in our home town. This was no less than a beacon of hope for so many poor residents who had thought they had fallen through the cracks of society.

When the Conference actually took place last November 26 - 28, the poor and homeless were nowhere to be seen, having been "relocated to other areas of the city, by enforcement officials," according to one City police officer. It is also unlikely they could have afforded the \$300 ticket price.

Has the significance of the Human Rights Conference made a ripple locally, provincially, internationally?

"You see a little bit here and there very briefly," says Poverty In Action's Midge Cuthill, "but nothing really, it's become a back burner issue again. Really, once the conference was done, that was it and that disappoints me in the fact that, where's the action coming from now, what are people going to do?"

Cuthill was on the last panel of the last day of the conference. Entitled "Meeting the Challenges: Disabilities, Poverty and Children in Need". According to Cuthill "this was one of the only 'real issue' panels."

"I thought our panel was very strong because we work with the issues every day," explains Cuthill. "My speech was called 'Beyond the Rhetoric', I really focused on the issue of poverty in Canada. It's sometimes very difficult for the real message to get out in the media. Being able to show pictures and tell actual stories instead of talking the 'big language'."

Because the panel was at the end of the day it was, of course, running late. "We didn't have a question period because we were running behind, so we didn't

have the opportunity for people to speak to us," says Cuthill. "We had people asking us questions as we were walking out the door and I don't know how fair that was."

"I was rather disappointed by the degree of interaction that I saw," said Professor David Schindler. He spoke on the first panel on the first day of the Conference, called "The Economy, the Environment and Human Rights". Schindler spoke on the severe shortages of water in the world and the forecast of problems due to those shortages. "Based on the sorts of critical scientific conferences I'm used to going to, it was very, very strange. People were sitting there waiting until they could say their parts and they weren't really listening to what others were saying."

There is a question of why did people feel the need to bring up unrelated human rights topics to the panels. The answer to that question might be answered with other questions: Why was a major panel discussion given to the ironical "Human Rights and Transnational Corporations," with CEO's giving speeches that could have been straight from a shareholders meeting? And why were there so many corporate sponsors like Syncrude, Royal Bank and Amoco Petroleum?

"We tried to bring the true concerns of human rights to the agenda," explains Saren Azer regarding trying to aid the organisers in forming the agenda of the November conference. "We tried to bring all issues that have been of serious concern for humanity to the conference but unfortunately none of the fundamental issues could make it to the table. For example it was only a number of months ago that several

thousand Tutsis were slaughtered."

Azer himself is no stranger to human rights abuses. Born in Kurdistan, Azer was a member of the Kurdish Writer's Union which was charged with advocating Kurdish identity and culture. "It was mostly short stories and poetry that I was writing," explains Azer. "In Turkey, the Kurdish language is forbidden. Speaking it is against the law. In Iran it is not that harsh but writing and publishing in the Kurdish language is against the law. I was in prison in Iran on three different occasions and I was in a Turkish prison once in 1994."

"Only last year 34,000 children died of hunger every day and this year it's reached 50,000," explains Azer. "It is fundamental and important enough to be discussed at this conference, but really wasn't truly discussed. There was at least a 40 minute introduction for Mary Robinson and her greatness and her activities in the Human rights area. It was called a celebration but I don't know what they found to celebrate," remarks Azer. "I thought of it as a cover for the true abuses that are happening in serious human rights issues around the globe."

After realising the delusion, Azer came to the conclusion that he and his colleagues must have the People's Human Rights Conference that would give the priorities to the victims of human rights abuses, "not to the deliverers." Azer, the Friends of Leyla Zana, and others who work in Amnesty International along with others started to organise. Now there are about 40 - 50 people involved in organising this conference.

"We have had four meetings to discuss the issues and our approach," explains Azer. "We have set up different committees for different regions of the planet and each committee is focusing on documenting human rights concerns and how these abuses are taking place. We are trying to seek a possible solution from the victims' side of the story."

Organising such a broad event seems insurmountable but the U of A Doctor sees the momentum building. "We have just begun and there is much to do," enthuses Azer. "If someone were to ask me point blank what the purpose of the conference is, I would say it is an event in support of humanity, an act of love, an act of compassion."

Any or all wishing to be a part of the Peoples Human Rights Conference here in Edmonton can contact Saren Azer at 436-0210 or email him at [sm110@sprint.ca](mailto:sm110@sprint.ca). ♦



## NEW JUVENILE PROSTITUTION LAW

### Most young prostitutes are victims of abuse and poverty

on the streets in the first place. Most of these kids are abused, physically or mentally, or their poverty is unbearable. Getting them off the streets is a start, but exactly what will be done during those 72 hours? Some of us feel that this could turn into another useless law. The police bring in the kids, and in three days they're back on the street. Will the police simply get tired of bringing in kids just to watch them return to the streets in a few days?"

Faith Brace of Inner City Pastoral Ministry is also watching with interest. Like others, she's pleased at the attempt to fix the situation, but she's also wary of

any notion that the new law will solve everything. "The legislation is good, but it's only one thing. There are other issues here; (they) don't get into it (prostitution) because of the Johns, and they won't get out of it just because of the law."

It should be noted here that neither of the two interviewees were against the law, merely raising questions as to the ambiguity of it.

Where the law is vague is in the 72 hour holding period. What will occur during those 72 hours? An Edmonton Journal article described the first person apprehended under the act as passing her time watch-

ing television. Obviously, the law is still so new that care workers are scrambling a little bit to put together a program. Hopefully a better system will emerge as more children are taken in. According to the tenets of the act, these teenagers would be interviewed and treated accordingly, whether turned over to their parents, or released if proven that they are over sixteen and can take care of his or herself. There are beds set up around the city in protective safe houses, to facilitate observation and treatment of children. After the three day period, the child would have to be released.



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**m** Grant MacEwan  
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# POETRY

Did you  
ever look at  
me that  
way!

She knocked you out  
with her knock-out legs

she crushed your soul  
with her vicious words

she stole your breath  
when she breezed in  
then out again

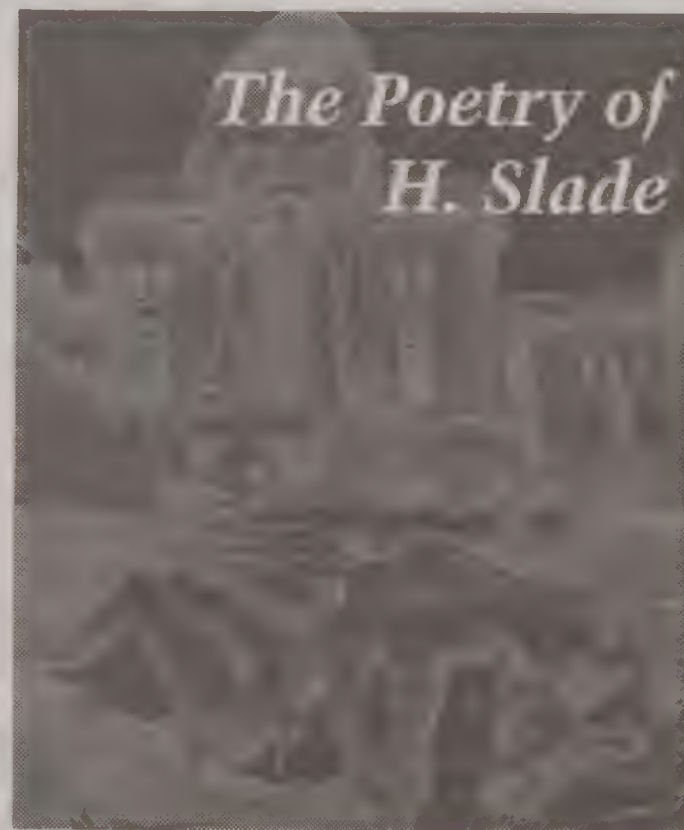
She seized your heart  
with her sultry eyes

and that's all you seem to  
remember

now, you run back to me  
with shattered heart in  
tow

and tears that splash us  
both  
and all I want to know

Did you ever look at me  
that way?



## Lapping Waters

## Left

Surging waves  
fire, ice  
trembling in your grasp

tidal waves  
primal currents  
move me  
while your  
tongue moves in me

reaching  
toward the power  
that spills through me  
as you drink me in

crashing, drenching  
breath-taking  
drowning under your swell  
under your spell

bursting from my body  
yet captivated by your  
probing love  
only your stubborn touch  
keeps mind and body bound

face to face now  
I taste me on you, in you  
we share the loving waters  
burning desire, perhaps now,  
quenched

you left me  
broken  
left me  
damaged  
left  
bruises

and it was never right

did you think I deserved it  
did you care  
did you think I liked it

I used to hate you  
everyone  
now instead  
I just hate me  
and hurt me

you're gone now  
but

I'm still here  
incapable of love  
just a trickling tear

Watch for  
Songs of the  
Street &  
An Inner City  
Poetry Night.  
This  
Summer!!





# Fighting the Odds

NEW  
FICTION  
PART TWO

STOCK  
ILLUSTRATION

*In last month's installment, we met Hope Morrissey, who thought that making a decision to break up with her husband meant her hard times were behind her. In this installment we're introduced to her job and learn more about why she had to be free of Kenny.*

By Allison Kydd

Some time after their tenth anniversary, Hope Morrissey's husband lost his fourth job in one year. Hope knew then that if she wanted any kind of security for her family, she was going to have to get a job herself. The problem was how to tell him -- he'd always said he didn't want her to work, that it made a man look bad if his wife worked. None of his pals' wives worked, he said.

When her husband told her that, Hope almost said what was on her mind.

"Kenny," she almost said. "You know that's not true. Your friend Carl's wife works at the Army and Navy on Saturdays; I've seen her, and I'm sure she's not the only one of them who works."

Just in time, however, Hope thought of the bruises she still had from the last time Kenny had thought she was calling him a liar. It'd really hurt when he'd twisted her arm behind her back, and she guessed she was lucky that he didn't break anything. So this time she kept her mouth shut and let Kenny think she believed him.

Still, she couldn't stand living in that kind of uncertainty, so she had to figure out a way that he wouldn't mind. The bookstore was a real brain wave. After all, his friends weren't readers anymore than he was, so no one would ever see her there. Surely, that would make it all right.

Kenny laughed when she told him she was going to apply at the bookstore across the street from the neighbourhood mall and didn't listen when she explained that it was just three blocks away and would be easy for her to walk there, even in the winter, and she'd be able to make

lunch for the kids and everything, just as if she was home all day.

"What makes you think they'd hire you?" he said, giving her a hug. This surprised her because hugs didn't happen very much anymore. "They want university types for a bookstore, real smart guys."

Hope was very much afraid he was right, but she still decided to give it a try. Surely they must have something she could do, back room work, packing and unpacking boxes of books, something like that. Wanting to do things right, she phoned to make an appointment. To her surprise, the manager asked her to come down for an interview later in the day.

When she arrived, she loved the look of the store and couldn't help feeling excited about the idea of working there, even though she told herself not to expect anything. She was glad she'd dressed very carefully in her best dress, the one she always wore to church, and that she'd done her best to clean the scuffs off her white sandals.

What she loved most about the store was the dark mahogany-coloured wood. It made her think of a church, with shelves and shelves of that lovely wood reaching almost to the ceiling every way she looked and all of them brimming over with books. The manager's office was downstairs.

In spite of the fact that Hope tried not to care too much, she knew when she stepped into the store that she wanted that job very much. So she was nervous and found herself stuttering as she tried to answer some of the manager's questions. Claire was the manager's name, Claire Thomas. She had a kind, almost motherly, manner. Hope thought that was a bit funny, since there couldn't be much difference in their ages. In experience, though, they would be worlds apart.

The two women talked quite a long time, then Hope knew the interview was over because Claire stood up and extended her hand. Hope would have liked to avoid shaking hands because she knew her hands were clammy, but that would

have seemed rude. If Claire noticed the moist handshake, however, she gave no sign, and very much to Hope's surprise, she phoned the next day to offer her a job. And not a job in the back, but a regular sales job, where people could see her. Those were Claire's words, in fact.

"You have a lovely smile and a nice manner. We want you out front, where people can see you."

When he came home from his weekly trip to the unemployment office, Kenny seemed even more surprised than Hope was about the job. To her relief, however, he wasn't mad. In fact, he was nice to her all evening, and they even made love that night.

Of course, things didn't stay that good for long. Hope soon remembered how when they were newly-weds Kenny made her quit her job. Then, of course, he could afford to make her quit, and she thought it was a sign of love. Now, he couldn't afford to stop her. Not when they'd even defaulted on the payments under a program called the Orderly Payment of Debts. And they'd gotten loans and renegotiated loans so often there wasn't a bank anywhere that would help them anymore.

Of course, when Kenny got a job again he tried to make Hope quit hers. She refused; she liked the feeling of the control it gave her. Of course, that made Kenny meaner and meaner. He was jealous almost all the time and kept warning her that if he ever came in the store and saw her talking to a man she'd be in trouble, and if she ever, ever thought of going for coffee with some guy she worked with, she might as well be dead.

In the end, after so many years of ups and downs, combined with a feeling of having a little power herself, Hope realised that she just didn't love her husband anymore. Sure, she felt guilty; and it wasn't that she thought she could find anything better, any better man. As far as she was concerned that part of her life was over. ♦

*Continued next month.*



## JOHN'S STYLE FILE

### Vi Matula

**John Zapantis**  
*Our Voice vendor, writer and  
photographer meets the most  
interesting people.*

When it comes to loving her day-time job and the art of illustration, Vi Matula enjoys the best of both worlds.

Vi is a research consultant and when she is not working at her full-time job, Vi loves to occupy her time as a talented pencil artist.

Art in the Metis culture is traditionally a talent passed on from generation to generation. For Vi, her unique talent is also a viable outlet for leisure and relaxation.

"It's incredibly absorbing and because I work in a really fast paced career, to go home and just lose myself in my art is just like total relaxation. It's something that I love. It doesn't seem like work, not like my job," she says.

Around three years ago, Vi's daughter came to Calgary to visit her. It was then that Vi's daughters noticed a series of drawings created by her mother when Vi was eleven. They had been buried and forgotten.

This prompted Vi's daughter to suggest that she enter the works in a local art show. Vi agreed and entered her work into the 1996 Calgary International Native Art Festival.

Since then Vi has also displayed her work



at the Native Arts and Crafts show in 1996 and the 1997 Dreamspeakers Festival. Her most recent art was on display at the Metis Week Art Show held at Grant MacEwan College in 1998.

Vi is fascinated by the art of transformation, when it comes to drawing people.

"I like drawing the very young and the very old. They have interesting faces. Little kids because they have these little wonderful poses that you would never be able to do again and older people because all of their character seems to appear in their faces."

**Our Voice** asked Vi Matula, "What words of advice would you give to young artists in high school, who would one day aspire to walk in your shoes?"

"Don't let anybody kill your spirits. Don't listen to so-called art teachers who tell you that something has to be done a certain colour or a certain way. Your way is always the right way. You do what's inside." ♦

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## Next month in **Our Voice** the spare change magazine

### Our 5th Birthday

In April, **Our Voice**, the spare change magazine turns 5 years old.

Watch for our double issue, the best of **Our Voice**, some of the best stories from past years reprinted. Also, next month, the return of Soupline Bob.

# Speeding bullet

by John Zapantis

Sometime in the first week of January, I was standing on the Northeast corner of 135 Avenue and 97 Street coming back from the Zellers department store after a light shopping spree. I was on my way to south Edmonton to find my friends and fellow **Our Voice** working associates as a way of occupying my leisure time.

The intersection had changed from wait to walk, so I began to briskly make my way across the street. I suddenly noticed a silver compact 4 door unidentified foreign car driving like mad towards me.

I realised that there was no compromise in having this vehicle come to an abrupt halt. The speeding bullet on wheels was increasing its speed and I was its target.

I immediately stopped one foot back, allowing myself just enough safe clearance from being considered Edmonton's first **Our Voice** vendor/writer traffic

fatality of the year.

For some strange reason I had the capacity of dissociating my emotional feelings from the fact that I was being targeted by this low-down, inconsiderate, would-be assassin driving this surging, speeding bullet on wheels.

After stepping back one foot and avoiding being tragically run down, I made it apparent to my would-be assassins that I was totally aware of their motives. I moved my left arm back quickly, tightened up my left fist and thrust my two hundred pounds of five finger clenched rage on to the rear window of the runaway vehicle.

The vehicle then accelerated at a quicker speed as it made its way northbound along 97 Street.

I was now angry as hell. I felt like a bold and surly Matador. I called upon that mobile "Bull"-et on



### The Speeding Bullet



wheels to challenge me again, in this Street Arena of Moral Justification.

The vehicle refused to challenge me. It drove quickly out of my visibility.

One thing assured, there was definitely no excuse for the carelessness this irresponsible driver displayed.

All I have to say now, is in case you the driver, the guy who jeopardised my life, is reading this article..."You shouldn't have a driver's license, so where did you get one from, if you feel empowered to drive recklessly without considering the fact that you were endangering my right of way and my life."

I guess the **Our Voice** readers and myself don't have to tell you where you got your license from. It's quite obvious...isn't it? ♦



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IN EDMONTON

# Dawna Romine

BY JOHN ZAPANTIS

Dawna Romine is a talkative and sales minded **Our Voice** vendor. She loves to influence passersby and customers with her popular humour.

Dawna has been selling **Our Voice** since November of 1993, when the magazine was then known as the Spare Change newspaper.

Dawna depends on the income that **Our Voice** provides to cover her living costs.

"I sell **Our Voice** to pay my bills, to buy clothes and food and personal needs like laundry soap and all kinds of things."

Dawna loves the advantages of meeting people and making money when selling.

"I like selling the magazine, the experience I get from selling, the experience of dealing with all these different types of people and I like the money," she says.

Dawna can be found selling **Our Voice** at 101 Street and Jasper Avenue or 105 Street and Whyte Avenue. ♦



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CITIZEN OF THE MONTH

## Ann Goldblatt

by Cec Garfin

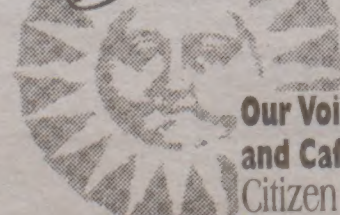
Ann has worked for the past two years as a Community Health and Development Team Leader at the Eastwood Public Health Centre. Her work entails helping staff with changes to existing programs or creating new programs. It's all relating to community strategies involving a variety of health interests.

Ann devotes many volunteer hours to various groups. She works with the Central Community Health Council, Health for Two, Economic Health project and Community Economic Development.

Ann is very devoted and is very thorough in her efforts to make Edmonton a better place to live. ♦



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**Our Voice Magazine**  
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Citizen of the Month

EVERY MONTH in **Our Voice**, we will be featuring someone who has gone the extra mile in their lives or in their careers to make a difference in the lives of those who are less fortunate.

The Citizen of the Month will receive a dinner for two courtesy of the Garneau Café Mosaics on Whyte Avenue.



# Winnipeg panhandler bylaw upheld

## NAPO takes anti-panhandling law to court on Rights Charter case

Story and photos by Rodney Graham in Winnipeg

Johnny Buchan had been panhandling on Winnipeg's skid row for thirty years. "I don't pan anymore though. The bulls pick my ass too much. I used to make forty dollars a day a few years ago, now I'll make five if I'm lucky," says Johnny.

"What the hell do you expect?" he adds. "Root hog or die, that's an expression from the dirty thirties. Poor bastards like us have been stepped on forever - no one gives a Goddamn about it. Why should they?"

Barry Fitzgerald has been panning for a year and a half.

"I was about forty feet from the Elephant and Castle and this security guard comes up and says 'You people are robbing of us thousands of dollars every day! Get the hell out of here! Next time I'll kick the shit out of you!'"

Most panhandlers on the street in Winnipeg say they have been chased away from their spot at least once and some are hounded regularly by security guards.

Most complaints to police are anonymous. The police come and tell them to move on or they arrest them. The alarming increase in the use of soup kitchens and other emergency facilities in the past year may be related to the increasing intolerance.

This is why the National Anti Poverty Organization (NAPO) stepped in.

Arne Peltz is NAPO's acting lawyer for a court challenge against the panhandler bylaw in Winnipeg. He is a forty-eight year old self-proclaimed idealist who has had many successes in his twenty one year legal career. Recently, Peltz represented George Harris, a member of CHOICES, a social rights activist group. Peltz successfully won the right for an individual taxpayer to take the government to court for allowing a billionaire family to avoid paying \$750,000 in capital gains taxes by moving the money to the United

States.

This time Peltz will be representing NAPO and about twenty panhandlers. NAPO filed a statement against the city in 1995 claiming that the anti-panhandling bylaw contravenes the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Prior to the challenge and before the bylaw was passed in 1995, City Hall sent the city's Committee on Protection and Parks and Culture off to complete a report on the topic. They came back with a recommendation to look at the existing criminal code as sufficient to address the problem of aggressive panhandling and a program called "Change for the Better". This was supposed to be the cure-all for panhandlers. Shopkeepers would have little boxes in their stores, where people could donate change. The money was then intended for social organizations.

They suggested that "interested parties" such as social services, police,



Barry Fitzgerald says panhandling is too tough.

and the Business Improvement Zone form a group to in effect remedy the aggressive panhandlers.

According to Peltz, the evolution of the bylaw had more to do with politics than anything else.

"There was an election coming," he said, "the councillors wanted to please the right people."

Mayor Glen Murray, former Councillor for Osbourne Village, was the main drafter of the present bylaw and a supporter of the anti-squeegee kid bylaw as well.

### No Compromise

The newly elected Mayor has left social activists, many councillors, the police and even city lawyers mystified by essentially vetoing the recommendations of City Hall. The City Hall lawyers met with Arne Peltz this past winter to try to at least reach a compromise and amend the strict bylaw. The hope was that only aggressive panhandling would be covered by the bylaw.

A five-to-one vote by the Executive Policy Committee canned the compromise. Now the issue goes to the Court of Queen's Bench where Peltz will argue that the bylaw is in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"The executive policy committee often does not represent what the Council wishes," says Nick Ternette, political analyst, "it more often represents what the mayor wants. They are hand picked for the committee by the mayor."

### Rolled the Dice

"What is incredible to me," Peltz said, "is that the recommendations of our meetings (City Hall and NAPO) were not even taken to city council for discussion, but straight to the mayor's handpicked E.P.C."

Many councillors, the city lawyers and even the chief of police supported a compromise draft of the bylaw.

"Now we go to court. They've really rolled the dice. They might have to drop the bylaw all together if the court rules it is in violation of the C.C.O.H.R.F.," says Peltz.

The challenge to the bylaw in the Court of Queens Bench will probably not begin until fall. The defense for the people charged under the bylaw will also be held over until fall, after the Pan Am Games this summer.

"The police continue to arrest the panhandlers," says Peltz, "often just moving them around."

"The judge is going to want to know why this bylaw is necessary. There are other less intrusive ways, namely legislation to control specific misconduct, as opposed to simply legislating against freedom of speech. They (the city) never really attempted to use the powers of the criminal code- it is sufficient to deal with aggressive panhandlers. It appears that the mayor may have been influenced by the B.I.Z. which wants to clear beggars from their store fronts. We have a good chance of victory," says Peltz.

Mayor Murray says that the bylaw does not make panhandling illegal. "People are not seeing this clearly," he said. "The bylaw is to regulate panhandling, not to ban it."

The NAPO statement of claim argues that the true purpose of the bylaw is to distance and separate panhandlers from the rest of the population - to avoid discomfort of proximity to indigents on the street.

"It's a comfort issue," says Peltz, "this is what we'll show in court. Shopkeepers do not want any real or imagined inconvenience to consumers."

The outcome of the bylaw challenge could affect thousands upon thousands of the poorest of the poor in Canada - either positively or negatively. Social rights activists are optimistic, but NAPO's campaign for the poor may need some super-human efforts. ♦



NAPO lawyer Arne Peltz

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